



# **Biblical Imagery in Medieval England, 700-1550 (Studies in Medieval and Early Renaissance Art History)**

*Michael Kauffmann*

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This study covers the whole of the Middle Ages from the Lindisfarne Gospels to the Reformation and concentrates on the relationship "Text - Image and Viewer". Within a broadly chronological framework, the treatment is thematic from the earliest carved stone crosses, through Anglo-Saxon Old Testament cycles and high medieval Psalters to the painted and carved imagery in the fifteenth-century parish church. Each section is firmly grounded in its historical context and the images are examined for their relationship with the biblical text and for the ways in which they served their patrons and viewers. Naturally enough, much of the imagery is based directly on the narrative books of the Bible but an almost equal part was inspired by commentaries interpreting the symbolism of the text and by apocryphal tales. It is from images, for example, that we know that the ox and ass were present at the Nativity, but they are not mentioned in the Gospels and their presence is derived from early biblical exegesis. As medieval writers freely admitted, the image often has a much more memorable impact than the text. To the viewer, therefore, an image could be, and often was, part of an extensive narrative cycle as well as being endowed with symbolic significance and charged with emotional power as an aid to devotion. For each period and each type of artefact, the viewer or patron is identified, often with surprising results, and his - or more often her - needs discussed. Illuminated manuscripts are the main survivors and their readership was, until the late Middle Ages, essentially clerical or aristocratic. But the same images on a monumental scale on wall paintings or in sculpture or stained glass were seen by all classes of worshippers even if some of the layers of meaning comprehensible to monks and higher clergy remained hidden to the wider lay audience.

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